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ABSTRACT

The Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations held a public hearing to examine the effects of poverty on the hundreds of thousands of low income Blacks and Latinos under the age of 18 residing in Los Angeles County (California). The Commission's findings, recommendations, and concerns are presented. The following findings are presented: (1) lack of adequate prenatal resources for black women and Latinas with resulting high mortality and morbidity rates of their infants; (2) inadequate community health services to serve the needs of poor Black and Latino children; (3) high rates of child abuse; (4) reductions in youth social service programs; (5) destructive media advertising; and (6) low expectations on the part of parents, peers, and educators. The following recommendations are made: (1) a study of Black and Latino infant mortality rates and a pilot program for its reduction; (2) a campaign to increase the level of utilization of preventive care services; (3) a mandatory high school parenting course; (4) increased school resources; (5) balanced college-vocational preparation; (6) an increase in parental involvement; and (7) an examination of successful model school programs. The commission names as concerns students' self-image, teen pregnancy, and parental involvement. A summary of the hearing testimony is provided, and a list of hearing presenters and a list of each presenter's recommendations are appended. (JB)

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LIMITED LIFE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLACK AND LATINO YOUTH

Report on a Public Hearing by the
Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations

December 1990

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Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations
320 West Temple Street, Suite 1184
Los Angeles, California 90012

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The Commission thanks the presenters for their contributions and the City of Compton for the use of its City Council Chambers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On April 26, 1990, the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations held a public hearing on "Limited Life Opportunities for Black and Latino Youth in Economically Depressed Areas." The hearing took place in the Compton City Council Chambers.

The Commission held this hearing to examine the effects of poverty on the hundreds of thousands of low income Blacks and Latinos under the age of 18 residing in Los Angeles County. Many of these young people will go on to live out their lives separate from the social and economic mainstream of one of our country's most affluent regions. Many have made, or will make, unfortunate and self-destructive decisions about gang involvement, substance abuse, or teen parenthood. Many will die young, victims of poor medical care, drug abuse, homicide, and other "unnatural" causes.

Testimony at the hearing was provided by 12 presenters. They included service providers, researchers, physicians, educators, and Black and Latino youths. Their names and organizational affiliations are listed in Appendix A at the conclusion of this hearing report.

Presenters addressed a wide range of issues, reaching from the cradle to the grave. Prenatal and perinatal circumstances, and lack of adequate health care, nutrition, housing, and other resources were cited in testimony.

Also noted were the effects of long-term poverty on educational and employment opportunities, and the "low expectation-low aspiration" syndrome, which limit Black and Latino youths' participation and success or failure in schools, business, and training programs.

Additional testimony focused on the issues of abuse and neglect, mental health, consumerism, illiteracy, and service needs.

The Commission's Findings, Recommendations, and Concerns, which are based on the information provided by the presenters, comprise Chapter II of this report.

Chapter III is a summary of key points made by the hearing presenters. Views recorded are those of the presenters, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commission. Appendix B is a listing of specific recommendations offered by presenters.

Written and tape-recorded testimony and documents submitted into the record of the hearing are on file at the Commission office and are available on request.

II. COMMISSION FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCERNS

A. COMMISSION FINDINGS

1. Black women and Latinas are more likely than White women to lack prenatal care and adequate nutrition and shelter, and to live with environmental hazards. As a result, their newborns and infants are at high mortality and morbidity risks.

2. Community-based and County-supported health services are not adequate to meet the needs of poor Black and Latino children, including preventive care such as immunizations.

3. While child abuse is distributed across ethnic lines, Black and Latino children are more apt to suffer from child neglect, which is closely linked to poverty.

4. Black and Latino students are more likely than Whites to be routed into non-college preparatory courses during high school; little outreach is aimed at monolingual Latino parents.

5. Reductions in youth social service programs have contributed to problems affecting poor Black and Latino youth, including teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and gang membership. Crime and gangs pose a disproportionate threat to the lives and well-being of poor Black and Latino youth.

6. Media advertising fosters a desire for immediate gratification and contributes to the frustration of poor Black and Latino youth. Also, alcohol and tobacco advertisements are often aimed at young Blacks and Latinos.

7. Low expectations by parents, educators, and peers lead to low life aspirations for poor Black and Latino youth.

A number of these findings are also supported by evidence provided at other Commission hearings.

B. COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Commission recommends that the Department of Health Services:

   a) Conduct a study of Black and Latino infant mortality within Los Angeles County and develop a pilot program for its reduction.

b) Institute a Countywide campaign to increase the level of Black and Latino utilization of preventive care service, e.g. immunization, drug abuse prevention, nutrition.

The Commission will discuss with the Department of Health Services the reasons for this recommendation.

2. The Commission recommends that the Los Angeles County Office of Education encourage school districts to require junior and senior high school students to complete a course in parenting before graduating. This would help to prevent the abuse and neglect of some children born to young parents.

   The Commission also recommends that the Office of Education communicate to local and State legislators the need to initiate such a program to develop successful models that can be shared.*

3. The Commission addresses the following recommendations to individual school districts within the County.**

   a) Provide adequate resources to meet the needs of Black and Latino students, e.g. sufficient dollars, experienced teachers and adequate physical facilities.

   b) Balance college preparation with preparation for occupational training and/or immediate employment.

   c) Increase the level of participation of Black and Latino parents in every phase of program planning and implementation at the school site level.

   d) Analyze successful model school programs in predominantly Black and Latino communities, e.g. Black Male Achievement Program, and replicate their policies and practices where feasible.

* This recommendation is similar to one which was suggested in the Commission report Kids, Crime and Jail: The Color of Juvenile Justice, page 5.

** This recommendation is similar to one which was suggested in the Commission report The Effects of School Reform on Black and Latino Students in Los Angeles County, pages 2 & 3.

C. COMMISSION CONCERNS

The Commission feels that many of the problems described in this report could be alleviated if the public and private sectors join with the community to concentrate on preventive measures.

For example, experts recognize that strengthening a child's self image leads to constructive decision making. More progress must be made to promote self-esteem through a variety of educational programs, and thus reduce the self-destruction of many Black and Latino youths.

Statistics show that pregnancy is the leading cause of school drop-outs. With young Blacks and Latinos at higher risk of living in poverty and lacking adequate health care, reducing early pregnancy can increase the potential for academic success. Family planning should play a major role in breaking the cycle of poverty and teenage pregnancy.

Frequently parents have few viable systems to address their areas of concern. Parenting in today's society is complex, and so are the skills required to produce successful students. Clearly there is a need for collaboration between parents, school administrators, teachers, and students to develop effective parent education programs that would open the lines of communication between school and home.

The Commission believes, therefore, that any efforts to reduce the problems of teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and gang involvement among Black and Latino youth should include an increased focus in the areas of self-esteem, family planning, and parent education.

III. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

A. STARTING FROM BEHIND

From the moment of birth, Black children are three times as likely to be poor than White children, and Latino children are more than twice as likely to be poor. This circumstance places Black and Latino children at increased risk for death, disease, and myriad other problems.

Infant Mortality and Morbidity Rates. According to Ernest Smith, M.D., Associate Professor, Charles R. Drew University, prenatal and perinatal circumstances often have a lifelong impact on Blacks and Latinos. Calling United States and Los Angeles County infant mortality rates comparable to those of Third World nations, Smith stated that "race, class, and greed" are important factors in the wide disparity between Black and White infant mortality rates.

Black newborns die at twice the rate of Whites. They are nearly three times as likely to be "low birth weight" babies, weighing under five and one-half pounds at birth. In addition, according to Smith, these children suffer much higher than average rates of congenital anomalies, heart and lung disease, and other life-threatening health problems.

Latino infants do not fit this profile, according to David Hayes-Bautista, Professor at the UCLA School of Medicine and Director of the Chicano Studies Resource Center. The neonatal death rate for Latinos closely parallels that of Whites. The babies born to immigrant Latinas, however, actually have a slightly higher survival rate than White infants.

Hayes-Bautista credited maternal "lifestyle" choices for this rate. He said that immigrant women are less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, use drugs, or give birth outside of marriage, all important factors in infant birthweight and mortality.

More disturbing is the finding that native-born Latinas quickly acquire the lifestyle habits of Black and White women. They use alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs at a much higher rate than their immigrant peers, and their infant mortality and morbidity rates reflect these habits.

Smith and Hayes-Bautista agreed that while the maternal profiles of the two communities may differ somewhat, both Black women and Latinas are more likely to become mothers while still in their teens. White women most often bear their children while between the ages of 24 and 39. Babies born to

very young women, according to Smith, are at greater risk of low birth weight, anemia, prematurity, and other life-threatening conditions.

Maternal Prenatal Care. Several of the problems leading to high rates of infant mortality and morbidity can be prevented or controlled if pregnant women receive early, ongoing prenatal care.

Unfortunately, many Black women and Latinas lack either medical insurance or the means to obtain adequate prenatal care. Because those covered by Medi-Cal often must wait several months for their first prenatal appointment, health-impairing conditions may go undetected. The lack of adequate prenatal care precludes early diagnosis of maternal conditions, including high blood pressure, drug or alcohol abuse, or sexually transmitted diseases. Left untreated, these ailments threaten the health of both the pregnant women and their babies.

Black women and Latinas are far more likely than White women to live in areas of the County plagued with poor environmental conditions. Maternal exposure to toxins and carcinogens may lead to birth defects, high blood levels of lead, and other problems which threaten the life and health of Black and Latino newborns, said Smith. He also stated that increased risk of both miscarriage and stillbirth is associated with such exposure.

Smith also noted that since medicine is a business, physicians and hospitals are reluctant to undertake the care of indigent pregnant women. This, he said, is "penny-wise and pound foolish," since failure to provide adequate maternal prenatal care may end in the birth of premature infants, who often accrue medical bills in excess of $100,000 before they are released from the hospital.

Smith noted that poor White women and their newborns face these same problems, but a significantly smaller proportion of Whites are poor. Therefore, Black and Latino newborns are at substantially higher risk than Whites.

Postnatal Care and Conditions. Even after Black and Latino babies overcome the many obstacles to a healthy birth, they must face other threats to their lives and health.

The cause of most of these threats is, simply, poverty. Poor children, according to Smith and Hayes-Bautista, are far less likely to receive adequate health care than are children born into more affluent households.

Although all poor children are at risk of receiving less than adequate health care, Latino children appear most vulnerable.

Black and Latino families are both disproportionately represented among the poor. However, Blacks are more likely to be recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which entitles them to Medi-Cal, the State's medical insurance for the poor.

Latino families, on the other hand, are far more likely to be found among the "working poor." These families, according to both Hayes-Bautista and the Reverend George Van Alstine, Chair of the City of Pasadena Commission on Children and Youth, have sufficient income to disqualify them from Medi-Cal eligibility. Yet, these families are still far too poor to afford the costs of either health insurance or regular health care.

Those Black and Latino families which do have Medi-Cal coverage often discover that it is difficult to locate a physician who will accept Medi-Cal patients. In fact, stated Van Alstine, only five pediatricians in the City of Pasadena currently accept Medi-Cal, and some of them are not now able to take on any new patients. Thus, parents must often travel long distances, on unreliable public transportation, to obtain health care for their children.

The lack of access to medical care, coupled with the inability of community medical clinics to meet the growing need, often mean that low income Black and Latino children fail to receive the immunizations which are taken for granted by more affluent families. This leaves these children at increased risk of contracting diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), mumps, rubella, measles, and other communicable and life threatening diseases. Poor minority communities have suffered a disproportionate number of child deaths during the measles outbreaks in the County of Los Angeles in the past several years.

Nutrition is another factor essential to good health. Every child should have an adequate, well-balanced diet. Once again, families receiving government aid from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program are more likely to have proper nutrition than children ineligible for such assistance. However, Van Alstine noted that only half of the nation's eligible families actually receive WIC benefits. This figure drops to 25 percent in California; three-quarters of eligible needy children do not receive assistance for which they are eligible. Van Alstine cited fundi] limitations as the root cause of WIC delivery problems.

Poor Black and Latino children who do not receive WIC benefits also miss other support. WIC Program recipients receive more than free food and vouchers; they also receive sound

nutritional advice. For young mothers, this advice can mean the difference between raising a healthy child or a child suffering from anemia and other vitamin or mineral deficiencies.

According to Smith and other presenters, poor nutrition has been proven to lead to overall poor health, dental abnormalities, vision problems, poor social adaption, diminished academic performance, and other problems.

Child Abuse and Neglect. Both Dr. Herschel Swinger, Director of the Southern California Child Abuse Prevention Training Center, and Dr. Karen Williams, Director of the Child Abuse Network, stated that cultural bias is demonstrated in the collection of child abuse data.

Although both Whites and non-Whites abuse their children at approximately the same rate, people of color, especially Blacks, are significantly more likely to be reported and punished for their actions. According to Swinger, Los Angeles County's Second Supervisorial District, with a high percentage of Black and Latino residents, accounts for over 40 percent of all recorded child abuse and neglect cases in the County. Williams noted that pregnant Black substance abusers are 10 times more likely than their White counterparts to be reported to the authorities by their physicians.

Both presenters also noted that the stresses associated with poverty may contribute substantially to the severity of abuse. Williams stated that Black children, compared to White children, are three times more likely to die from known child abuse.

Homicide is the ultimate form of child abuse, and children of color are killed at an alarming rate in our society. Dr. Williams indicated that Black children are three times as likely to be murdered between the ages of five and nine, and four times as likely to be murdered before age one or as teenagers than White children. Although these acts are not necessarily perpetrated by a parent or other systematic abuser, they are nonetheless acts of child abuse, said Williams.

She also cited statistics of other traumas that constitute abuse of Black children. They are twice as likely as White children to see a parent die or to live in substandard housing. They are three times as likely to be placed in classes for the retarded or have their mothers die in childbirth. They are five times as likely to be incarcerated as teenagers.

Dr. Swinger noted that child neglect cases outnumber child abuse cases in Los Angeles County. He said that child neglect

reports increase as family income decreases; the poorest children are at greatest risk. Child neglect is more likely to result in the death of a child than is child abuse, he said.

Poverty prevents parents from providing adequate nutrition, housing, medical care, and other necessities for their children. The result is child neglect. Adult substance abuse is another major component in child neglect as dysfunctional, addicted adults ignore the needs of the children, said Dr. Swinger.

Drs. Swinger and Williams both pointed out that such factors as lack of employment, poverty, lack of education and job skills, poor self-esteem, and general feelings of hopelessness make poor Blacks in economically disadvantaged areas more likely to escape into substance abuse, thereby increasing children's risk of abuse and neglect. Finally, both Williams and Swinger cited that child abuse practices are often passed on from one generation to another.

B. BARRIERS

Language and Cultural Barriers. Several presenters cited language as a barrier to full participation in community life by Latino youth. Lack of English proficiency inhibits Latino access to information, programs, and services which could improve their economic condition, and precludes them from many sectors of employment. Presenters pointed out the increasing need for bilingual services in Los Angeles County, in order to provide an adequate level of services to non-English proficient youth.

Cultural barriers were also cited by some presenters as barriers for Black and Latino youth. Our society, according to Dr. Gloria Romero, Assistant Psychology Professor at California State University, Los Angeles and David Sandoval, Director of the Educational Opportunity Program at the same institution, holds White European cultural behavior to be the norm and all other behaviors as inferior.

Sandoval stated that college recruitment programs and other important social programs lack the cultural awareness needed to have a significant impact among poor minority youth.

Education. Educational inequities were the most frequently cited factor in limiting life opportunities for poor Black and Latino youth in Los Angeles County.

The Reverend George Van Alstine noted that these students are more likely to attend overcrowded public schools, while White children are more likely to attend private schools. He

strongly criticized California for ranking last in the nation in expenditure per pupil as a percent of per capita income, and for underfunding sorely needed bilingual education programs.

The tendency of educators to place Black and Latino students into non-college preparatory courses was cited by David Sandoval as biased and exclusionary. He noted that the percent of Black and Latino youth entering a college or university is declining, perhaps because they are steered away from higher education by teachers and counselors, or perhaps because government does not provide enough student loans, grants, and scholarships.

Inaccurate history texts and lack of relevant curriculum material were cited by several presenters, including Sandoval, Romero, and UCLA student Monica Estrada. Estrada also complained that Latino youth are encouraged to take such courses as home economics or auto mechanics, while White peers with the same grade average are steered into math, science, and other college preparatory courses.

Lack of outreach to Latino parents was also cited as a problem by Estrada. She said that there were few forums, workshops, or other community programs available to provide monolingual parents with information about the rewards, opportunities, or experience that a higher education offers.

Dr. Bettye Davis-Walker, Principal at Ralph J. Bunche Elementary School, talked about the need for expanded educational support services, especially those designed to keep young Black males in school. She cited her school's Black Male Achievement Project, supported by local business leaders and staffed by Black male teachers, as the type of program needed Countywide to provide Black male students with self-esteem, pride, skills, and a sense of accomplishment necessary to scholastic retainment.

Employment. While parental unemployment or underemployment causes many Black and Latino children to begin their lives in poverty, their own lack of employment opportunity often condemns them to ongoing impoverishment.

David Sandoval noted that high-pay, low-skill industrial jobs once available to poor minority youth in inner city areas are vanishing. He stated that during the last 20 years, over 250 small to mid-sized industrial employers have abandoned the Avalon, Watts, South Vermont, and Florence-Graham areas of the County. He blamed underdevelopment for the growth of an underclass among Black and Latino youth. Employment opportunities no longer exist in the areas where most minority youth reside.

Van Alstine stated that minority teenagers are five times more likely than their White counterparts to be unemployed. He also called drug trafficking the "wild card" factor in unemployment among Black and Latino youth. Poorly educated, untrained, unemployed youth are easy prey for drug dealers, who promise them more money than they could otherwise earn in the minimum wage jobs for which they are qualified.

According to Vernice Dredd, Employment Representative, California Employment Development Department, inferior education and inadequate training programs set the stage for high levels of minority youth unemployment.

Presenters, including Hayes-Bautista and Sandoval, stated that racism has led employers to avoid hiring qualified minority youth, or to hire them for the lowest wage work, reserving the high-pay, high-prestige jobs for White youth.

Crimes and Gangs. Citing gangs and drugs as the two greatest threats to the lives of poor Black and Latino youth, Audubon Junior High School student Charles Peterson spoke of lives filled with "booby-traps." He said young minority males often join gangs to have a sense of belonging, or because not joining puts them at even greater risk. He noted that gang membership often provides a level of protection that families, communities, and law enforcement are unable to sustain.

Gangs have also become major players in the drug trade, according to George Van Alstine. This has caused them to become better financed and more sophisticated. Gang members stay involved beyond adolescence because of this lucrative gang aspect.

Crime has a disproportionate impact on poor communities, stated several presenters. Van Alstine noted that homicide is the leading cause of death for young Black males. As indicated earlier in this report, Black children and youth are at far greater risk of homicide than Whites of the same ages. They are also much more likely than Whites to die of abuse or to see a parent killed.

While poor Black and Latino youth are often the victims of crime, they are also disproportionately incarcerated for the commission of crimes. According to David Sandoval, a recent Los Angeles Times report indicated that one in every four young Black males is either in jail or prison, or on parole or probation, compared to only six percent of young White males. Much of this is the result of drug-related arrests. Studies by both the FBI and the National Institute for Drug Abuse showed that Blacks make up only 12 percent of the nation's drug users. Sandoval concluded, "Police efforts at narcotics interdiction have been disproportionately concentrated in minority communities."

Prejudice and Discrimination. Most presenters cited prejudice and discrimination as root causes of many of the problems mentioned in this report. Examples of discrimination ranged from guiding minority students into non-college preparatory courses and use of racially biased curriculum to disparate arrest rates for Whites and minorities and disparate employment opportunities.

Discrimination is behavioral and apparent. Prejudice, which is attitudinal, is more difficult to quantify. Yet presenter after presenter stated the belief that prejudice is an important factor in limiting the life opportunities of Black and Latino youth.

David Hayes-Bautista stated that inaccurate perceptions of immigrants as undocumented, reliant on government programs, and backward adversely affect Latino youth.

Attitudes related to class and race, said Dr. Ernest Smith, are of the greatest importance in decisions about allocating funding for health care and other services.

According to Dr. Gloria Romero, society has an "us vs. them" mentality, with Black and Latino youth being viewed as "them" by those in power. She said this limits productive living potential, and also does psychological violence to minority youth. Calling this attitude systemic and institutionalized, she stated that existing social structures are designed to maintain the status quo, which holds back opportunities for young Blacks and Latinos.

Both student presenters expressed concern that they were viewed by teachers and classmates as less capable than White students. Actions of teachers validated this concern, they said. Bettye Davis-Walker indicated that society appears ready to "write-off" an entire generation of young Black males.

Dr. Karen Williams reiterated Sandoval's arrest statistics for young Black males. She further stated that Black students are twice as likely as Whites to be suspended from school or subjected to corporal punishment at school, four times as likely to be in foster care, and six times as likely to be under the supervision of a child welfare agency. This, she indicates, is prompted by prejudice and a demand for cultural conformity.

Low Expectations and Low Aspirations. UCLA student Monica Estrada spoke of her own high school experience as she addressed the issue of low expectations and low aspirations. She was discouraged from taking the rigorous math and science courses which would have prepared her for college. She was,

instead, encouraged to take such courses as sewing and cooking, and she said that Latino male students were similarly encouraged to enroll in auto repair or wood shop courses.

Estrada said that this system undermines the potential of Latino students, provides little academic success, and discourages the aspiration to pursue higher education.

Bettye Davis-Walker stated that lack of role models and lack of self-esteem lead to low expectations of and by young Black males.

Lack of employment opportunity leads many Black and Latino youth to give up aspirations for higher education, according to David Sandoval. Without part-time work, many young people are unable to afford tuition, books, fees, and transportation to attend college or university. He also noted that society's reluctance to pay the price of educating people for a decent future further serves to demoralize impoverished Black and Latino youth, causing them to cease aspiring to succeed in high school and go on to college.

C. ADDITIONAL SOCIETAL PRESSURES

In addition to the barriers explored in the above section of this report, a number of other societal pressures serve to limit life opportunities for poor Black and Latino youth.

Diminishing Resources. Dr. Herschel Swinger stated that the poor are often blamed for their plight. This blame justifies cuts in government services and programs. At the same time, the "savings and loan fiasco" consumes hundreds of billions of our tax dollars in a bail-out for the wealthiest, said Swinger.

Dr. Ernest Smith cited inadequate health care funding as a major factor in the infant and neonatal mortality and morbidity rates in Los Angeles County, and noted that this problem will continue if public attitudes about race and class do not change.

Blaming Proposition 13 and other tax cuts in the 1980's, Rev. George Van Alstine said that resources for poor minority youth have declined. In Pasadena the average income in the Linda Vista area is $86,000, while in the heavily Black and Latino area of Northwest Pasadena the average income is $18,000. He stated that the $68,000 income difference makes a vast difference in the quality of life for Black and Latino youth, and further said that the communities most in need of services and programs are least able to obtain them.

Several presenters, including David Hayes-Bautista and Monica Estrada, stated that bilingual services are not keeping pace

with increased need, and in some cases there is pressure to do away with such services altogether.

Charles Peterson blamed cuts in youth programs for the increase in both drug abuse and gang activity. He also stated that inadequate funding for sex education may be a contributing factor in the rising rates of teen pregnancy, AIDS, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Materialism and Media. The media has great influence on the lives of young people, and according to some presenters its influence is a bad one. However, according to Los Angeles Urban League President John Mack, only during the past decade has media's negative impact been truly felt by poor Black and Latino youth.

Stating that television and radio advertising were directed primarily at the White middle class until 1980, Mack argued that the past decade's advertising directed at all races has particularly harmed Black and Latino youth. Media advertising, he said, is not designed to enhance solid values among youth, but appeals to the desire to have it all, and to have it right now.

He cited the $14,586 annual income gap between Black and White families as placing many material goods out of the reach of Black youth. In frustration, some of these young people "hit the streets for a quick buck." Mack called crack cocaine "the get-away car of the '80s," and blamed media for fostering the quest for immediate gratification that has led to drug selling and drug abuse among poor Black youth.

Although she did not appear at the hearing, Sister Elizabeth Thoman, Executive Director of the Center for Media and Values, submitted written testimony validating much of Mack's presentation. She called the media "reality-shaping," and stated that many people, especially the poorly educated or unsophisticated, use television as a guide for making life decisions.

Thoman also addressed the issue of minority portrayals in media, and indicated that minorities are negatively stereotyped. She also claimed that television news has ignored day-to-day coverage of minorities, and focused on episodes of violence.

Ray Chavira, representing both the Los Angeles County Alcohol Policy Coalition and the National Latino Council on Alcohol and Tobacco, blamed the media for targeting Latino youth in their advertising campaigns. He was especially concerned with billboard advertisements, calling them the primary vehicle for promoting poisons to minority youth. Billboard advertisements

are most heavily concentrated in the Black and Latino area of South Central Los Angeles County.

Chavira also informed Commissioners that the primary cause of death for youth between the ages of 15 and 19 is alcohol-related accidents. He said that, while this hearing was designed to address limited life opportunities for Black and Latino youth, his goal is to limit death opportunities for this same population.

Peer Pressure. Student presenters Monica Estrada and Charles Peterson both cited peer pressure as a significant problem in the lives of Black and Latino youth.

Estrada stated that teenage pregnancy presents a real threat to life achievement for young Latinas, calling it "the baby trap." She noted that the cultural stigma attached to teenage sexual activity, combined with parental reluctance to communicate sex information to their teenagers, places Latinas at high risk. At the same time, young Latinos of both sexes are under great peer pressure to engage in sexual activity. Estrada said that teenage childbearing is one of the most critical barriers to academic achievement for young Latinas, since many who have the ability to succeed in college or university become mothers instead.

Peterson agreed, saying that there is pressure among Black teens to become sexually active in order to prove manhood or womanhood. He cited sexual activity without thought of the consequences as a factor in the rising rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among minority adolescents.

Substance abuse was also cited by Peterson as a subject of severe peer pressure. He said that teens find it difficult to refuse alcohol or drugs when their friends are using them. Sometimes it is easier to participate than to speak out against the dangers of drugs and alcohol, he stated, and teens "go along to get along."

Estrada, Peterson, and other presenters also indicated that a Black or Latino youth who wished to excel and expand his or her life opportunities must also confront the peer pressure of defeatism. Since life holds so little opportunity for the vast majority of these young people, many give up without trying to find avenues of success. Those who begin with high hopes and aspirations must fight an ongoing battle with the prevailing attitude, which tells them "This is impossible, don't waste your time trying," or "You're poor and you're Black (or Latino), so no one is going to care what happens to you."

Peterson also spoke of peer pressure as one of many components in the growth of gang membership among young Blacks and Latinos. He noted that, for many, gang membership offers a sense of belonging that is otherwise lacking in their young lives.

HEARING PRESENTERS

Ray Chavira
Board Member
National Latino Council on Alcohol and Tobacco

Bettye Davis-Walker, Ph.D.
Principal
Ralph J. Bunche Elementary School

Vernice Dredd
Employment Representative
State of California, Employment Development Department

Monica Estrada
Student
University of California, Los Angeles

David E. Hayes-Bautista, Ph.D.
Director
Chicano Studies Resource Center,
University of California, Los Angeles

John Mack
President
Los Angeles Urban League

Charles Peterson
Ninth Grade Student
Audubon Junior High, LAUSD

Gloria Romero, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Psychology
California State University, Los Angeles

David Sandoval
Director
Educational Opportunity Program,
California State University, Los Angeles

Ernest H. Smith, M.D.
Associate Professor, Cardiology
Department of Pediatrics, Martin Luther King Drew Medical Center

Hershel K. Swinger, Ph.D.
Director
Southern California Child Abuse Prevention Training Center,
California State University, Los Angeles

Elizabeth Thoman, CHM (written testimony only)
Executive Director
Center for Media Values

Reverend George Van Alstine
Chair
Pasadena Commission on Children and Youth

Karen Williams, Ph.D.
Director
Child Abuse Network, Drew Child Development Corporation

PRESENTERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

At the hearing, presenters offered a number of recommendations aimed at alleviating the problem of limited life opportunities for Black and Latino youth in economically depressed areas:

Ray Chavira

1. The County Board of Supervisors should enact a conditional use permit ordinance regulating alcohol outlets in unincorporated areas of the County.

2. The Board of Supervisors should enact an ordinance banning new billboards, or appropriately restricting their placement.

3. The Board of Supervisors should endorse and actively promote the Alcohol Tax Act of 1990, which earmarks most of the monies raised for local human and social services.

4. The Board of Supervisors should support other proposed alcohol and tobacco taxes.

Bettye Davis-Walker, Ph.D.

1. Adopt Black Male Achievement Programs at several school sites in the County.

2. Compile and document program data.

3. Communities should assist in securing funding of these programs.

Vernice Dredd

1. Solicit youth input in development of employment training programs.

2. Raise community expectations of Black and Latino youth.

3. Elected officials should develop a youth policy.

4. Supply pregnant teens who leave school with home tutors to enhance their educational opportunties and avoid the welfare trap.

Monica Estrada

1. Allocated funds to insure more challenging academic curricula, more sex education, advanced placement courses, more experienced teachers, and better equipped schools.

2. Offer bilingual representatives, fliers, workshops, and other community services to provide information about access to, and opportunity for, higher education.

David E. Hayes-Bautista, Ph.D.

1. Implement 5 to 10 year study of Latino adolescents to address Latino family issues..

2. Hold a series of Latino adolescent panels to develop patterns of influences, choices, and the reproduction of Latino strengths.

John Mack

1. We urge that the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, in cooperation with organizations, aggressively push the Beverly Hills and Madison Avenue advertising agencies to employ more African-American and other minority professionals and executives.

2. We propose the encouragement of a significant increase in joint ventures between the major advertising agencies and minority advertising agencies.

3. We strongly urge that the big advertisers contract directly with African-American, Latino, and Asian advertising agencies.

4. We urge that greater sensitivity and care be taken by both advertisers.

5. We recommend that there be an increased emphasis in the utilization of successful African-Americans, both professional and blue collar ad models, as role models, without an overemphasis on the superstar entertainers and athletes.

Charles Peterson

1. Develop more youth recreational activities to provide an alternative to drugs and gangs.

2. Include mandatory drug and gang prevention and sex education classes in school curricula.

Gloria Romero, Ph.D.

1. Change the mental health system to reflect the County's ethnic diversity; stop using White European behavior as the norm.

David Sandoval

1. Refocus priorities away from victim-blaming and police solutions to socioeconomic problems.

2. Develop jobs for low income minority youth.

3. Address the City's housing crisis.

4. Direct greater resources of time, money, and personnel to the neediest students.

5. Hold Human Relations evening hearings on the issue, accessible to inner city parents and youth.

Ernest H. Smith, M.D.

1. Change public attitude toward adolescents, the poor, minorities, and single women, and adequately fund programs which serve them.

2. Increase support for public health care, and remove the threat that big business will take over all health care.

3. Add more health education and healthy lifestyles classes to school curriculum.

4. Place health care provision on the State, and health care acquisition on the parents.

5. Develop educational, recreational, and employment support systems for families.

Herschel K. Swinger, Ph.D.

1. Increase support for early child abuse intervention programs.

2. Focus services on victims, not perpetrators.

3. Have the Interagency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) explain why so many reported abuse cases are from poor minority areas of the County.

4. Support child abuse research.

5. Advocate funding for the child abuse prevention.

6. Support community child care programs.

7. Support job training programs in schools and in the juvenile justice system.

8. Focus on patterns of racial discrimination which perpetuate and contribute to child abuse.

Elizabeth Thoman, CHM

1. Encourage the development and implementation of a media awareness education curriculum throughout the school system -- elementary, junior high, high school and also for adults through community-based organizations, programs, seminars and conferences.

2. Encourage family and social service systems to be sensitive to the media connection particularly in dysfunctional home situations.

3. Because Los Angeles County is so intimately tied to the multiple industries that create our current media culture, the County and City might very well challenge this private sector to increase its social responsibility for the impact of its products on the larger society.

Rev. George Van Alstine

1. Change allocation of County funding resources to reflect need rather than dividing funds evenly among 5 Supervisorial Districts.

2. Develop strategy for determining need and equitable funding distribution.

3. Adopt a County goal of guaranteeing adequate health care as a basic human right for all residents, and take steps to implement this goal.

Karen Williams, Ph.D.

1. Establish a Countywide representative group of parents, young people, community people, and professionals to address the problem of child abuse.

2. Reistate child abuse prevention program funds eliminated at the State level.